

Germany lifts dioxin-related bans on 3,050 farms

January 10 2011, By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER , Associated Press



In this picture taken Jan. 6, 2011 turkey hens look for feed in Neerstedt near Oldenburg, northern Germany after it was closed. German authorities have stopped more than 4,700 farms from selling their meat and eggs as a precautionary measure against a growing scandal over animal feed contaminated with cancer-causing chemicals that is also affecting exports. Authorities believe some 150,000 tons of feed for poultry and swine containing industrial fat have been fed to livestock across Germany. The fat contains dioxins and should not have been in the food. (AP Photo / Keystone / David Hecker)

(AP) -- Livestock feed producers must face stricter controls and Germany and other EU nations must have better, more centralized dioxin monitoring, German officials proposed Monday after high dioxin levels prompted the closure of thousands of farms.

Agriculture Minister Ilse Aigner said officials were working nonstop to

find out who and what had contaminated the feed sent to thousands of farms and vowed tough legal action against those responsible.

"The damage that has been done is immense," she told reporters after a meeting with feed producers. "There must and will be consequences in this case."

She said companies should be banned from producing both industrial fats and fats used for livestock, to avoid the possibility that industrial fats could end up being in [animal feed](#).

Aigner said her ministry was in talks with the [European Union](#) on better controls and monitoring and she was confident they could "find a common European solution."

Authorities are investigating the German firm Harles & Jentzsch GmbH, which had produced fat used in the tainted feed pellets. Samples of the fat contained more than 70 times the approved amount of [dioxin](#), according to tests published Saturday by the Schleswig-Holstein state agriculture ministry.

The scandal broke last week when German investigators found excessive levels of dioxin in eggs and some chicken. Authorities then froze sales of poultry, pork and eggs from some 4,700 farms as a precaution.

As of Monday, over 3,050 farms had been reopened after being inspected, but 1,635 remained closed. Slovakia also lifted a ban on German farm products.

Aigner said while the tainted products posed no direct health risk to humans, she had told feed producers Monday that "they actively need to contribute to finding the causes for the contamination and come up with concrete ideas on how to avoid cases like this."

Dioxins are contaminants that often result from industrial combustion, and exposure to them at high levels is linked to an increased incidence of cancer.

In addition to Slovakia, South Korea banned the sale of some German farm products, and supermarkets in Britain withdrew quiches and cakes made with German eggs from their shelves.

Consumer protection pressure group Foodwatch said Monday its own tests of a contaminated sample was 164 times over the legally tolerated dioxin level.

The group concluded the dioxin came from pesticide use on crops that were later used to produce the fat and urged the government to force livestock feed producers to probe all their ingredients for excessive dioxin levels.

Aigner declined to comment on Foodwatch's report.

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